



NEWS RELEASE

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SBA Answer Desk Now Offers E-Mail Service For Small Business Entrepreneurs

WASHINGTON - America's 25 million small business owners and future entrepreneurs can now e-mail their questions about starting and growing their businesses to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). SBA has expanded its Answer Desk service to the Internet.

The new service builds on SBA's toll-free telephone Answer Desk Service, which handles nearly 3,000 information requests each week. Ten business information assistants, who answer specific business questions and provide information on SBA programs and assistance, staff the Answer Desk, located in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The new service will allow persons seeking answers to business questions to e-mail their requests through the SBA website – www.sba.gov – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, telephone callers can speak with a business information assistant during regular operating hours.

“Our mission is to help people start and grow their businesses. The expansion of the Answer Desk to the Internet is the latest example of our effort to provide greater access to SBA's programs and services. Now a small business person can ask specific questions, day or night, with the click of the mouse,” said SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez.

Besides answering specific questions, the Answer Desk staff directs callers to the wide range of publications and information resources available through their local SBA office and at the SBA website.

“Not all questions are easy ones,” said Lee Cornelison, SBA district director in North Carolina. “We answer questions such as ‘How do I start a business?’ or ‘How do I get a loan?’ immediately. Some others require research. We’re averaging nearly 3,000 calls each week and the goal of our Answer Desk staff is to respond to all questions within one work day,” he said.

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Answer Desk operating hours are 9:00AM – 5:00 PM, Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. The toll-free number is 1-800-U-ASK-SBA (1-800-827-5722). Spanish-speaking business specialists are available at the Answer Desk.

The Top Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I get a small business loan?
2. How do I get a small business grant?
3. How do I get started in business?
4. How do I get a business license?
5. How do I get a tax identification number?
6. How do I write a business plan?
7. What type of collateral do I need for a loan?
8. Is there any small business assistance available in my area?
9. What classifies a business as “small”?
10. How can I get my business certified as woman- or minority-owned?

The U.S. Small Business Administration, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. With a portfolio of business loans, loan guarantees and disaster loans worth more than \$45 billion, the SBA is the nation’s largest single financial backer of small businesses. Last year, the SBA offered management and technical assistance to more than one million small business owners. SBA also plays a major role in the government’s disaster relief efforts by making low-interest recovery loans to both homeowners and businesses. America’s 25 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation’s gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.

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